

Gen. Oliver Otis Howard

An Appreciation by A. Z. Conrad, D.D.

GEN. OLIVER OTIS HOWARD was one of the master men of his day. His was an imperial manhood. A boy of nine returned one evening from a church social service and astonished his parents with the statement that he had spoken in the meeting.



A. Z. Conrad, D.D.

It was an unheard-of thing for a boy of his age in that day. He felt the compulsions of duty. The boy was father of the man. What he did at nine he did through his life, answered the roll-call with promptness and positiveness.

Another incident: A youth of fifteen is on his way to Bowdoin College; he is invited by his companions to drink; he declines; he is told that all great men drink. Reflecting a moment, he answered, "Then I don't want to be great." Again the boy was father of the man; he could neither be driven, coaxed, or sneered away from his conscience. College finished, we find him at West Point Academy, a Bible in one hand and a sword in the other. He exhibited all the heroism of a soldier in adhering to his principles during those years.

1857 has come; he is now Lieutenant Howard and in Florida. Then something happened. No man amounts to much until something happens between himself and God. A great thing happened to Howard; he lifted up the gates of his soul and invited in the King of Glory. From that moment he was a *master man*. He was a courageous confessor and never lost an opportunity to declare his allegiance to his King and Lord. The discipline of the schools had given him much of self-mastery, but now his conquest of self became complete. He laid the foundation for a great commander in the absoluteness of his obedience to the higher mandate of conscience and the spirit.

1861 has come; the roll of the drum, the note of the bugle, found him comfortably located as instructor at West Point; the blood of the soldier was coursing in his veins; he becomes Colonel Howard, leading the Third Maine Volunteers. The first battle of the war is on; it is the battle of Bull Run. Conspicuous for his bravery, he is honored with promotion.

June 1, 1862, has come; the awful slaughter of Fair Oaks

tests the qualities of every soldier and every commander. He is equal to the emergency. At the very crisis of the battle the young officer stands out conspicuously as a fearless leader in awful conflict. The battle emptied one sleeve of his coat.

Antietam, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville follow. Distinguishing acts of valor characterized all his activities. With an irrepressible hope and an undaunted courage, beloved by his own troops, and feared by the enemy, he was the inspiration of thousands of men. His empty sleeve was a continuous proclamation of his heart heroism. The supreme moment of his military life was at Gettysburg when word came to him that Reynolds was dead and that he himself was now the chief officer. With an almost supernatural wisdom he ordered the battle, and through those days of purgatorial strife proved himself a master as a soldier, as a man.

Congress rises to do honor to the noble commander. Lookout Mountain, Missionary Ridge, Atlanta, add to the luster of his name. With Sherman and Slocum through the Carolinas, he comes finally to the battle of Bentonville, the last real conflict of the war. Throughout those awful years of strife not one stain soiled his escutcheon, and never once was his sword dishonorably lowered.

Great to command, he was also great to serve, and his service in peace indeed was not less noteworthy than that in war. As commissioner of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, he gave his best service to his country. The humanism of Jesus found blessed expression in his life. The founding of Howard University revealed his spirit of loving interest in the helpless and dependent.

What made General Howard the imperial man he was, commanding the respect of every class throughout America? Why was it that when he rose in public assemblages all the people were wont to stand with bowed heads as though in the presence of an extraordinary person? Here is the secret of his power: His threefold faith in God, humanity, and himself; his untiring zeal, his unwavering conscientiousness, the fixedness of his principles, his loyalty to his convictions, his humility and his gentleness, his humaneness and his sympathy, his magnanimity for friend and foe, and preëminently, first, last, and always, his fellowship with Jesus Christ. There is nothing like it. It gives an imperial quality to character. He was distinctively a product of the Christ of the Bible. God bless his memory to the ennoblement of the American youth.